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Do Europeans (really) prefer norms over force?

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Twenty-five years ago, John Mueller published *Retreat from Doomsday*, which has been the subject of a vast debate among international relations scholars ever since¹. In this book, Mueller argued that what he called “major wars” have become “obsolescent” since World War II, because of a growing public aversion to war. According to him, this phenomenon is principally due to the devaluation of ancestral military values (honor of dying for one’s nation, male bravery on the battlefield, military glory associated with victory) and to more acute awareness of the human loss, suffering and destruction provoked by total wars. In other words, pacifists have overcome the pro-war proponents in the long-running battle for the representation of war, which has therefore led to the disappearance of major wars, as occurred with ancient social practices like duel or slavery in the past.

Mueller’s thesis has been contested on many grounds: for promoting a conception of war detached from structural factors (such as international anarchy and states’ struggle for power and security), for neglecting the revival of many kinds of violent war (from civil and “ethnic wars” to asymmetric “wars on terrorism”), and for overlooking the impact of the “revolution in military affairs” which allows for wars which have a minimum cost in terms of soldiers’ lives (air bombing strategies, use of drones and special forces) and make them more acceptable (if not “attractive”) in the public’s eyes. Mueller’s argument has also been challenged by post-9/11 US strategy in Afghanistan and Iraq, which has been interpreted by some authors as the rise of a “new American militarism”².

However, Mueller has continually confirmed his stance on the waning of major wars³, and been joined on that ground by many specialists of military history⁴ and also by a number of international relations scholars⁵. The diffuse impact of Mueller’s analysis has especially remained very strong for Europe, around the core idea that “post-modern” Europeans - who

¹ John Mueller, *Retreat from Doomsday. The Obsolescence of Major War*, New York, Basics Books, 1989.

² Andrew Bacevich, *The New American Militarism. How Americans are Seduced by War*, Oxford and New York, Oxford University Press, 2013.

³ J. Mueller, “War has almost ceased to exist : an assessment”, *Political Science Quarterly*, Summer 2009, p. 297-321 ; J. Mueller, “Accounting for the waning of major war” in Raimo Väyrynen (ed.), *The Waning of Major War. Theories and Debate*, Abingdon and New York, Routledge, 2006, p. 64-79.

⁴ See John Keegan, *A History of Warfare*, New York, Knopf, 1993, p. 59 ; Martin Van Creveld, “The Waning of Major War” in Raimo Väyrynen (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 97-112 ; Michael Howard, *War in European history*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2009.

⁵ Michael Mandelbaum, “Is Major War Obsolete ?”, *Survival*, 40, winter 1999, p. 20-38 ; Christopher Fettweis, “A Revolution in International Relations Theory : or, what if Mueller is right ?”, *International Studies Review*, 8, December 2006, p. 677-697 ; Joshua Golstein, *Winning the War on War : the Decline of Armed Conflict Worldwide*, New York, Dutton, 2011. See also the influence of Mueller’s thesis in France with the collective book edited by Jean-Vincent Holeindre and Frédéric Ramel, *La fin des guerres majeures ?*, Economica, Paris, 2009.

have been committed to the European integration process for over half of a century - *now reject war as much as they waged war in the past to build their empires, nations and states.*

The idea that Europe perfectly embodies the normative devaluation of war must also be combined with the “normative power” literature, which is more specifically devoted to the conceptualization of the European Union in international relations. Built upon the original works by Ian Manners, the idea that the EU qualifies as a “normative power” means that, when exploring the puzzle of the nature of “European power”, we must look at “what the EU *is* rather than at what the EU *does*”. For Manners, the EU’s identity in international relations lies in particular in core European values such as democratic norms, the rule of law, peace, and social norms⁶.

The normative power approach has undoubtedly refreshed the former conceptualizations of the EU as a “civilian power” and as a “soft power”. Manners’ concept has encountered considerable success among academics concerned with conceptualizing the EU’s influence and “post-modern” power in international relations⁷. One of them, Zaki Laïdi, has gone further by searching to *oppose norms and force* in the EU’s posture⁸. According to him, Europeans clearly “*prefer norms over force*” and “*reject Realpolitik*” in international relations⁹. He more precisely states: « *For Europeans, military force is clearly not to be used as an instrument of hard power* »¹⁰. And he concludes: « *Norms are and will remain not only Europe’s best shield but also its finest banner. The collective capacity to resort to force will never constitute a political goal in itself for Europe* »¹¹.

As a result of these two branches of literature, it is now commonly assumed that war and military force belong to the past history of Europe, and that the EU, deeply committed to its normative, soft and civilian “nature”, has now everything to do with peace and almost nothing to do with war. But to what extent can we assume that the Europeans really “prefer norms over force” in any circumstance? And how can the regular commitment of European governments to large scale military operations in the post-cold war era be explained?

In this paper, I argue that there is *still space for military force in the relationship of the Europeans with the rest of the world*. More precisely, I advocate that European governments do not so much hesitate to resort to force in critical security situations and that when they do so, they are, under certain conditions, backed by their citizens. Finally, I suggest that the Europeans believe much more in *just war norms* than in the ontological “superiority” of norms over force.

The regular participation of European forces in military operations in the post-cold war era

A first empirical argument to bear in mind is that European states have been very frequently involved in large scale military operations in the post cold war era. During the War in the Gulf (1991), the UK sent more than 53 000 soldiers – operation “Granby” –, and France more

⁶ Ian Manners, “Normative Power Europe: A Contradiction in Terms?”, *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 40 (2), 2002 ; Ian Manners, “The Normative Ethics of the European Union”, *International Affairs*, 84 (1), 2008.

⁷ See in particular Richard Whitman (ed.), *Normative Power Europe : Empirical and Theoretical Perspectives*, Palgrave, Macmillan, 2011.

⁸ Zaki Laïdi, *Norms over force. The Enigma of European Power*, Palgrave, Macmillan, New York, 2008.

⁹ Idem, p. 53.

¹⁰ Idem, p. 56.

¹¹ Idem, p. 139.

than 16 000 troops – the “Daguet” division - to participate in the so-called “Desert Storm” operation. In 1999, the NATO air strike campaign against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia’s military infrastructure and headquarters (78 days of bombing), designed at stopping a new scenario of ethnic cleansing in Kosovo, mobilized several European countries, notably France’s, Belgium’s and the UK’s aircraft together with the *US Air Force*. In the 2003 US war against Iraq, although a much more controversial war vocally opposed by France and Germany, several European States (the UK, Spain, Poland, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal, Slovakia, etc.) not only politically supported the invasion, but also deployed troops during the occupation of Iraq, again up to 40 000 soldiers for the UK. After the fall of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan in 2001 and the creation of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), all European NATO members committed troops, again the UK sent around 9 500 soldiers and Germany more than 4 500¹². Taking into account the rotation of troops during the long occupation of Afghanistan gives even more impressive figures: for example, more than 60 000 French soldiers were sent to Afghanistan over a ten year period¹³.

Again, in 2011, NATO led a six month air strike campaign against the Kaddafi forces - more than 26 000 air asset sorties -, in which the UK and France played a key role, which helped the Libyan rebels to overthrow the regime in October 2011. Less than two years later, in January 2013, François Hollande decided to launch a military intervention in Mali (operation “Serval” mobilizing up to 5500 soldiers) to rollback a range of radical Islamist armed groups who were threatening the unity of Mali. Finally, in December 2013, Hollande opened a new “French front” in Africa by deciding another intervention in the Central African Republic (operation “Sangaris”) designed at protecting the civilians from mass crimes and helping restore public order in this country. By the end of February 2014, 2 000 French soldiers had been sent there, waiting to be joined by 500 soldiers from other European States by April 2014.

Last but not least, one must keep in mind that the EU per se has led a number of military operations within the framework of the Common Foreign Security and Defense Policy as from 2003: notably operation “Artemis” in the Democratic Republic of Congo during summer 2003, operation “Althea” in Bosnia from December 2004, operation “Eufor” in Chad and the Central African Republic in 2008, and the maritime operation “Atalante” along Somalia’s coasts from 2008. The objectives of these missions ranged from short peacekeeping mission (“Artemis”) to long lasting post-conflict stabilization operations taking over from NATO forces (“Althea”)¹⁴, “military humanitarian” operations designed to protect civilian refugees (especially Sudanese populations fleeing the violence in Darfur) with “Eufor” in Chad/CRA, and securing navigation routes by deterring piracy attacks along Somalia’s coasts (“Atalante”).

In all cases, France contributed most of the troops, but compared to the vast and/or offensive military operations previously mentioned (Gulf War , NATO intervention in Kosovo, war and occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan, intervention in Libya), the EU external operations display quite a “low” military profile. The majority of the EU led operations (“Artemis”, “Althea”, “Eufor”) look much closer to UN peacekeeping and humanitarian missions with quite a limited number of troops engaged¹⁵. The most potentially offensive one was “Atalante” but

¹² figures in 2010.

¹³ Jean-Charles Jauffret, *La guerre inachevée : Afghanistan 2001-2013*, Autrement, Paris, 2013, p. 205.

¹⁴ “Implementation Force” (IFOR) in 1996, “Stabilization Force” (SFOR) from 1996 to 2004.

¹⁵ The number of troops deployed was 2 200 for “Artemis”, 3 700 for “Eufor Chad/CAR”, 1 800 for “Atalante”. The highest number of troops was for “Althea” in Bosnia at the beginning of the operation (7 000), but the

its role principally ended up being deterrent. So far, European troops deployed under the banner of the EU have never been confronted with difficult conflict situations. This limited scope of EU military operations clearly means that the EU does not reflect the “European militarism” worldwide¹⁶. Since *the European Union is actually less relevant than its individual member states and NATO when it comes to war*, it is worth underlining that *theorizing the relationship of the Europeans in terms of the use of force only through the lens of the EU may be misleading*.

Indeed, it is clear how regularly European governments have engaged in “hard” military ventures in the post cold war era. Thus, as Giegerich and Wallace pointed out ten years ago, Europe is “not such a soft power”, if we admit that the governments who take these decisions are those who hold a considerable part of Europe’s representation on the international stage¹⁷. To be precise on this point, we will take the intertwining between the external ventures of European States and the EU’s international “presence” for granted, both from an analysis of what “European foreign policy” actually is - a systemic combination of common policies formally endorsed by the EU and of national foreign policies of EU members states¹⁸ - and from the external perception of what “Europe” is and does in the world¹⁹. In this perspective, we shall consider the national diplomacies of EU member states – including their international military operations – as an essential *contribution to Europe’s stance on the international stage*.

European citizens’ support for military operations: how and when

Both national polls conducted in countries which participate in military operations and transnational polls such as the *transatlantic trends* (TT) offer a considerable amount of precise information about public support for these operations. These data have been quite under-exploited so far and will help to support the hypothesis of this paper along with some results from national surveys, especially about France’s recent military operations.

As a starting point, let us underline what is supposed to be the fundamental “strategic cultural gap” between the Europeans and the Americans in their relationships with war. Indeed, according to the 2013 TT Report, when asked if they agreed that « war is sometimes necessary to obtain justice », 68% of Americans said that it is, while only 31% of Europeans agreed. This discrepancy between American and European attitudes to the legitimacy of war

security situation there had already been stabilized by a decade long presence of NATO’s forces (from 1996 to 2004), which authorized Althea’s troops to be steadily reduced over the last ten years (800 remained on the ground in 2013).

¹⁶ This is one of the conclusions that may be drawn from the record of ten years of European Defense Policy according to Anand Menon (in « Empowering Paradise? The ESDP at Ten », *International Affairs*, 85 (2), March 2009, p. 227-246). Other authors such as Roy Ginsberg and Susan Penksa are less critical but nevertheless do not see the EU as more than a “niche security actor” (R. Ginsberg, S. Penksa, *The European Union in Global Security*, Palgrave/MacMillan, 2012), whereas Mary Martin and Mary Kaldor praise at least the assertion of the EU as a “human security” promoter (M. Martin, M. Kaldor, *The European Union and Human Security*, London, Routledge, 2010). For a wider overview of the debate about the EU as an international security actor, see especially Sven Biscop, Richard Whitman (eds), *Routledge Handbook of European Security*, Routledge, London/New York, 2013.

¹⁷ Bastian Giegerich, William Wallace, « Not such a soft power : the external deployment of European forces », *Survival*, 46 (2), summer 2004, p. 163-179

¹⁸ On this conception of European Foreign Policy, see Brian White, *Understanding European Foreign Policy*, Basingstoke, Palgrave, 2001.

¹⁹ See Sonia Lucarelli, Lorenzo Fioramenti (eds), *External perceptions of the European Union as a Global Actor*, London, New York, Routledge, 2010.

has been a constant finding of the Transatlantic Trends polls: when already asked in 2004 (in the aftermath of the US invasion of Iraq) whether they agree or disagree with the assertion that, under some conditions, “war is necessary to obtain justice”, 82% of Americans said that it is, which was exactly the double of the proportion of Europeans supporting this idea (41%)²⁰. These repeated figures from one year to another across TT surveys undoubtedly sustain the idea that war is considered as a more “banal” and legitimate instrument of foreign policy in the US than in Europe.

But before stupidly claiming that “Americans come from Mars and Europeans from Venus”²¹, two corrections must be made to this first statement. First, there may be huge disparities in the support for war from one European country to another. For example, in 2004, agreement across Europe upon the idea that war is “sometimes necessary to obtain justice” ranged from 25% in Spain up to 69% in the United Kingdom²². Actually, British citizens are closer to Americans than to their European partners when justifying military force (in the 2013 TT survey again, 59% of the British interviewed said they agree to the conditional necessity of war while 68% of Americans and 31% of Europeans did). A first lesson must be drawn from these figures: with such differences from one European country to another, any generalization about the “aversion” of the “Europeans” to war and about their *collective* “preference for norms over force” is biased. It is quite obvious that *national cultures of security* still matter as much as the collective expression of “European preferences”²³.

Second, another strong objection must be raised against the stereotype of a “transatlantic divide” about war because European citizens display a high level of trust in their armies, which contributes to explain why they support their involvement in international interventions²⁴, but chiefly because the level of support very much depends on which war. Indeed, each war has a very specific international background (intensity and violence of the conflict, support of the UN for an intervention, involvement of regional security organizations, size of the coalition mobilized, etc.). Each war also relies on specific justifications (“fight against terrorism”, humanitarian or peacekeeping operations, etc.) and is hence based on very different types of rationale and storytelling in the media and in the political discourse. Therefore it is necessary to examine each war’s international background, justifications and types of storytelling and to try to correlate these situational elements with the varying levels of public support for each war considered.

At first, looking back more precisely at the public support for the war in Iraq is highly instructive. We remember that this war was justified by a set of very volatile conditions by the Bush administration: no strong evidence but mainly speculations about the existence of an Iraqi stock of weapons of mass destruction supposedly threatening the world’s security, the refusal of the White House to give more time to international inspections in Iraq, fears about alleged (but not proven) links between Saddam Hussein’s regime and Al Qaeda, the very controversial argument of a “preventive war”, the uncertain and contestable objective of constraining the Iraqi regime to convert to democracy by force, and last but not least, no formal resolution adopted in the UN Security Council to legitimize the declaration of war. In

²⁰ TT 2004, p. 18.

²¹ Robert Kagan, *Paradise and Power: America and Europe in the New World Order*, London, Atlantic Book, 2004.

²² TT 2004, p. 18.

²³ Peter Katzenstein (ed.), *The Culture of National Security: Norms and Identity in World Politics*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1996.

²⁴ Céline Belot, “Backing our men: comprendre le soutien des Français et des Britanniques à leurs forces armées”, *Gouvernement et action publique*, 2(4), October-December 2013, p. 595-619.

this context, it is not surprising that in 2004, 80% of Europeans did not believe the war in Iraq was “worth the loss of life and the other costs”²⁵. But it is not obvious that the transatlantic gap was that wide, since there were fewer Americans (44%) who believed the war was “worth the costs” than Americans who did not (50%). Besides, it must be underlined that there were exceptions to the condemnation of the war in Iraq among Europeans: notably in the UK and in the Netherlands, both countries which deployed troops in the occupied Iraq, the public support for the participation of their country in this military operation respectively reached 50% and 58% of the respondents.

Now, though strong majorities in France (93%) and Germany (89%) supported their government’s decision not to send troops to Iraq, it is noticeable that the majority of respondents in both countries (63% in France and 57% in Germany) nevertheless said they “*would support deploying their country’s military forces to Iraq if the United Nations approved a multinational force to assist with security and reconstruction in Iraq*”. These very interesting figures may be interpreted as follows: going to war against Iraq by bandwagoning on a unilateral military attack by the US was strongly opposed by the French and by the Germans, whereas both undoubtedly supported the idea of joining a multilateral military operation designed at restoring Iraq’s security and reconstruction. In other words, the French and the Germans did not oppose any use of military force in Iraq, but they praised a more of a “peace building” force and ideally a UN-backed operation. As a whole, 82% of Europeans believed UN approval would be “essential to secure international approval before using military force if a situation like Iraq were to arise in the future”. Even “when the vital interests of their country are at stake”, 49% of Europeans disagreed that “it is justified to bypass the UN” whereas only 44% agreed. Europeans’ disapproval of the unilateral dimension of the war in Iraq, due to the lack of UN backing, has been confirmed by many other surveys²⁶. Fitting the concept of “effective multilateralism” advocated by the “*European Security Strategy*” unveiled in December 2003 as one of the EU’s main credentials in international relations, it is clear that UN support makes a difference in the variable legitimacy the Europeans are ready to grant an international military operation.

As regards the military intervention in Afghanistan after 2001, it was framed by the western governments and the media upon a core justifying argument: stabilizing, “securing” and democratizing the country in order to prevent any resurgence of the Taliban power and any risk of seeing their Al Qaeda allies finding a sanctuary in Afghanistan again. The legitimacy of this operation was reinforced by a formal UN mandate²⁷, a wide-reaching international coalition behind the US, and the leadership of the International Security Assistance Force transferred to a regional security organization, namely NATO as from 2003. Concerning this intervention, the data presented in the 2004 TT survey are particularly relevant since they were collected during 2003, when NATO took over the ISAF. At that time, a majority of Europeans supported the presence of their country’s troops there (notably 59% in Germany, 55% in France and 50% in the United Kingdom).

²⁵ This figure and following figures are extracted from the 2004 TT survey.

²⁶ See in particular the data of the *Pew Global Attitudes* survey and of *Gallup International* analyzed by John Springford in ‘Old’ and ‘New’ Europeans united: public attitudes towards the Iraq war and US foreign policy”, *Center for European Reform background brief*, December 2003, available on http://www.cer.org.uk/sites/default/files/publications/attachments/pdf/2011/back_brief_springford_dec03-3848.pdf

²⁷ Especially the Security Council Resolution 1386 adopted on December 20, 2001, which created the ISAF.

Several years of military occupation later though, with no significant improvement in the security situation on the ground but a rising death toll among ISAF soldiers and repeated casualties among Afghan civilians due to US and ISAF military action “collateral damage”, the European public support for keeping troops in Afghanistan dramatically eroded. Hence the 2012 TT survey revealed that a majority of European citizens (51% in Germany, 52% in the UK and up to 61% in France), when asked “what to do about troop levels in Afghanistan” wanted to withdraw them completely, and a majority also stated that intervening in this country was a “mistake”. Similarly, polls conducted in France over ten years show that French people’s support for the participation of French troops in Afghanistan collapsed from 55% in October 2001 to 28% in February 2011 (with 72% of the respondents being opposed to this participation at that time)²⁸. The 2014 TT survey put these figures in perspective though, by underlining that there were still 53% of European citizens (up to 64% of respondents in France and 60% in Germany) who supported keeping troops in Afghanistan at least to “train the Afghan army and police”. All in all, the erosion of European support for the operation in Afghanistan is not surprising per se, since many surveys conducted on public support for military interventions show that, whatever the legitimacy of the operation may be at the outset, expectations of “success” matter the most as the operation continues over time.²⁹ In another words, public opinion may endure a higher level of casualties than we might have suspected, but only if the possibility of a “victory” remains plausible for the national troops in the end.

Let us now turn more specifically to the evolution of French Public opinion about a series of military interventions in which France has played a key role over the last three years: the NATO-led air strike campaign in Libya in 2011, the French intervention in Mali in 2013, and the latest French operation in the Central African Republic launched at the end of 2013.

The background to these three interventions is very different. In Libya, the aim of the operation was at first to prevent civilian bloodshed which had clearly been threatened by the Kaddafi regime (especially in the “rebel” city of Benghazi). The intervention was then presented as a “humanitarian military” intervention. It was also rooted in widespread political sympathy for the Libyan insurgents, perceived as “democratic forces” fighting Kaddafi’s repressive rule in the regional context of the 2011 “Arab spring”. France participated in the military operation together with other countries notably the UK³⁰, with a formal UN “mandate”, at least at the beginning of the intervention. Indeed, the 1973 UN Security Council resolution, adopted on 17 March 2011, authorized the international community to establish a “no-fly zone” and to use “all means” necessary (short of foreign occupation) to protect civilians, on the basis of the so-called “responsibility to protect”. A controversial debate took place when, as the air strikes went on for several months, the coalition gave the impression that the objective of the operation had moved towards a “regime change” in Libya, far beyond the formal mandate given by resolution 1973³¹. The French public support for this intervention closely followed this debate. Support was quite strong at the beginning (66% of

²⁸ See the IFOP poll available on http://www.ifop.com/media/poll/1412-1-study_file.pdf

²⁹ See Richard Eichenberg, “Victory has many friends: US Public Opinion and the Use of Military Force, 1981-2005”, *International Security* 30 (1), 2005, p. 140-177. Christopher Gelpi, Peter D. Feaver and Jason Reifler, *Paying the Human Costs of War*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2009.

³⁰ France and the UK were at the forefront of the military intervention, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Greece, Italy, Jordan, the Netherlands, Norway, Qatar, Romania, Sweden, Spain, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates, and the US officially participated in the implementation of the “no-fly zone” in Libya.

³¹ See Mélanie Albaret, Emmanuel Decaux, Nicolas Lemay Hébert, Delphine Placidi-Frot (eds), *Les grandes résolutions du Conseil de sécurité*, Paris, Dalloz, 2012, p. 550-563.

respondents “in favor” of the intervention in March 2011) and unsurprisingly declined over time, down to 49% “in favor” of the operation in August 2011 (with 51% “not in favor”).³²

The intervention of France in Mali in 2013 illustrates a completely different case. The intervention was first justified as a French Government response to a request for assistance from the transitional government of Mali in Bamako, which was threatened by the progression of radical Islamist forces in the North. The intervention was then officially justified by the emergency of preventing the entire country’s fall into the hands of these non-state armed groups and by the need to restore the territorial integrity of the country. But the presence of “jihadists” and Al Qaeda members within some of those groups also led François Hollande to label this intervention a local “war on terrorism”, an expression that the neoconservative US president George W. Bush had accustomed us to, but which was less predictable from the mouth of a French socialist President³³... Anyway, this vision of the French intervention as destined to neutralize a “terrorist threat” in Mali just echoed a vision shared in the UN Security Council itself³⁴, even if the legal question of whether France could claim to act on the basis of a formal Security Council “mandate” remains open³⁵. There was no ambiguity whatsoever about the French public’s support for this operation at the time it was launched. According to two polls conducted in January 2013, the approval ranged from 63% to 75%³⁶.

The latest intervention of France was operation “Sangaris” which was launched in December 2013 in the Central African Republic. The case was again totally different from Mali. The violence perpetrated by armed groups in the Central African Republic (the Muslim rebel force called “Seleka” and the Christian militias “anti-Balaka”) which followed the overthrowing of President Bozizé by Michel Djotodia allied to the Seleka in March 2013, was qualified a “*pre-genocide*” situation by the US State Department in November 2013, an analysis which was quickly endorsed by the French Minister for Foreign Affairs, Laurent Fabius. The French intervention was then framed as a “military humanitarian” operation aiming at stopping the slaughter and at disarming the militias. French public opinion was again quite supportive when the operation was launched, with 51% of approval in early December 2013, less than for the operation in Mali at the beginning of the year though, which reflects the demobilizing effect produced by the repeated scenario of France’s involvement in internal conflicts in Africa³⁷. Besides, though the public support for this operation seems more volatile, its domestic legitimacy was clearly confirmed by a vote in the French Parliament on February 25 2014, which approved the extension of this operation by an overwhelming majority³⁸. Later on, the legitimacy of an international intervention in this country was

³² See the IFOP survey available on http://www.ifop.com/media/poll/1593-1-study_file.pdf

³³ *Le Monde*, « La guerre contre le terrorisme, version française », 15 January 2013.

³⁴ See its Resolution 2085 adopted on 20th December 2012 as well as its Press Statement (SC/10878) on 10/01/2013.

³⁵ Actually, the Security Council resolution 2085 had authorized the use of force by an “African-led international mission” but also urged all UN member States, including “*interested bilateral partners*”, to provide assistance to this mission. On the ambiguity of a UN legal basis for the French intervention, see Karine Bannelier, Theodore Christakis, “Under the UN Security Council’s Watchful Eyes: Military Intervention by Invitation in the Malian Conflict”, *Leiden Journal of International Law, Issue 4, Vol.26, 2013, p. 855-874*.

³⁶ See respectively the IFOP survey available on http://www.ifop.fr/media/poll/2115-1-study_file.pdf ; and the BVA survey available on http://www.bva.fr/data/sondage/sondage_fiche/1220/fichier_les_francais_et_lintervention_militaire_au_mali014_4e.pdf

³⁷ See the IFOP poll available on http://www.ifop.com/media/poll/2438-1-study_file.pdf

³⁸ In the National Assembly there were 428 votes in favor, and only 14 against. See <http://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/14/scrutins/jo0783.asp>

confirmed by a UN Security Council resolution adopted on 10 April 2014, which has decided the deployment of a significant UN peacekeeping force (12 000 “blue helmets”) as from September 2014.

Europeans do not prefer “norms over force” but believe in “just war” norms

It seems quite clear from what has been said in this paper that Europeans neither systematically “prefer norms over force” nor that their “aversion to war” is so strong that it would prevent any European military commitment. What empirical facts tend to suggest is that, with considerable variations from one European State to another, *Europeans still believe in “just war” norms*. The just war doctrine has been the subject of a considerable and long lasting literature, fueled for centuries by theology, international law and political philosophy, and is still now a very important and prolific branch of normative thinking in international relations. This literature has notably been very much updated by the moral discussions triggered by the contemporary “new wars”, especially international “humanitarian military” interventions within civil wars, the “global war on terror”, and counter-insurgency wars in Afghanistan and Iraq³⁹.

As we know, the just war doctrine relies on a set of fundamental criteria: a “just cause” restricting the use of force to legitimate defense situations (a response to an attack), a legitimate authority to undertake war, a decision to go to war as a last resort after having exhausted all other means (diplomacy, mediation, sanctions, etc.), the proportionality of the armed response to the level of aggression, the differentiation between combatants and non-combatants, especially civilians. It is worth specifying that the cases qualified as “legitimate defense” have considerably diversified over the last twenty years. Not only are classic cases of invasion of a sovereign state by another (Kuwait invaded by Iraq in 1990 for instance) considered as typical attacks justifying an armed response in the name of collective security, but so have been numerous cases of mass crimes committed during civil wars and/or state repression of civilian populations (Somalia from 1992, Rwanda in 1994, Bosnia in 1994/95, Kosovo in 1999, Libya in 2011, etc.). In these cases, international military interventions may gain legitimacy for the sake of stopping the killings, protecting civilians, and securing the delivery of humanitarian aid provided that the military intervention has a “reasonable chance of success” (i-e may not cause more victims than the number of lives expected to be saved by the intervention).

All in all, this just war framework may shed more light on the European perceptions of the great post-cold war military operations. At first, the very divisive configuration and overall low level of European support to the 2003 war in Iraq may be explained by the failure of the Bush administration to meet all the just war criteria: first, as a preventive war, it could not be claimed to fall into the category of a legitimate defensive war ; second, the US had no “legitimate authority” granted by the UN, and third, the number of civilian casualties caused

³⁹ See the fourth edition of the classical Michael Walzer’s *Just and Unjust Wars*, New York, Basic Books, 2006, but also, among many books : Brian Orend, *The Morality of War*, Peterborough, Broadview Press, 2nd edition, 2013 ; Nicholas Fotion, *War and Ethics : A New Just War Theory*, London, Continuum, 2007 ; Alex Bellamy, *Just Wars : From Cicero to Iraq*, Cambridge, Polity, 2006 ; Steven Lee, *Ethics and War : An Introduction*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2011 ; see also in French : Gilles Andréani, Pierre Hassner (eds). *Justifier la guerre ?*, 2nd edition, Paris, Presses de Sciences Po, 2013 ; Christian Nadau, Julie Saada, *Guerre juste, guerre injuste : histoire, théories et critiques*, Paris, Presses universitaires de France, 2009.

by the US long-lasting counter-insurgency occupation of Iraq and the subsequent waves of Iraqi nationalist, inter-confessional and jihadist violence led to a clear violation of the principle of differentiation between combatants and non-combatants. By contrast, the high level of European support for the intervention in Afghanistan at its beginnings fits with an intervention which was perceived as a legitimate collective security response to the 9/11 attack perpetrated by a terrorist organization hosted by the Afghan Taliban regime. This early support eroded over time though, when it became clear that the “reasonable chance of success” of the international military occupation of Afghanistan had become minimal, and that new victims were being added to an already high death toll without at the same time solving the security threat posed by the Taliban.

As regards the interventions in Libya in 2011, in Mali and in the Central African Republic in 2013, we can presume there were rather high levels of public support – at least at the beginning – because these interventions were perceived as legitimate defense. Indeed, the intervention in Libya could be justified as a collective security response – within the framework of the “responsibility to protect” - to a situation in which the civilian population has been attacked by a repressive government. The operation in Mali could be legitimized as a UN-backed response to a call for external assistance made by a state threatened in its own territorial integrity by non-state armed groups. And the intervention in the Central African Republic could be morally based on the necessity to halt growing and uncontrolled inter-confessional violence among populations in the context of a collapse of local government rule.

My paper brings us to the conclusion that the alleged “aversion to war” displayed by the Europeans according to Mueller’s grand picture of the “obsolescence of major wars” may contribute to explaining why Europeans have not waged devastating total wars since 1945, but clearly does not go as far as proscribing any European military venture. Actually, European governments have participated in a number of important military operations in the post-cold war era, sometimes quite offensive ones, with most of the time a significant level of public support as revealed by surveys. This public support, analyzed in the light of the just war doctrine, shows that *Europeans believe more in just war norms than they systematically prefer “norms over force”*. Especially, European citizens may support their governments engaged in military operations whose aim is to save lives within violent conflicts or to combat terrorist organizations, provided that these military operations are legitimized by the United Nations and do not last too long. In the end, my argument casts doubt on the conceptualization of Europe as a “normative power” in international relations. Indeed, how can Europe be a “pure” normative power “preferring norms over force” in any circumstance as Zaki Laïdi puts it, when European governments so often decide on military ventures with regular strong public support? To what extent can the conceptualization of the EU be detached from the acts of its constituencies (its member states) and the values of its citizens?